As three dozen world leaders meet in Panama, April 10 to 11 for the 7th Summit of the Americas, conventional wisdom is to watch Barack Obama and Raul Castro. After all, this is Cuba's first attendance since these summits began in the 1990s. Based on the principles of democracy and free trade, the Organization of American States had excluded Cuba since the Castro regime obviously practices neither. Despite that reality, President Obama is normalizing relations with Havana after more than 50 years. While most people will focus on Obama and Castro, the man to watch isn't Barack, 83-year old Raul, nor his 88-year old brother Fidel. Obama is already something a lame duck, with Republicans controlling Congress and less than two years left in office. And both Castro brothers don't have much time left. Period. The man to watch is Ecuador's Rafael Correa, wherever he might be. He represents the future and his growing influence is more powerful than most think, and now is playing games with the summit, saying he might even boycott. Once Venezuela's Hugo Chavez died of cancer in 2013, Correa has quietly assumed the mantle of Washington's top adversary in Latin America. He has railed against "Yankee Imperialism," rallied fellow left-wing *caudillos*, and cozied up to our rivals Iran, Russia and China. While Chavez protégé Nicolas Maduro, a former bus driver, awkwardly stumbles in Caracas worsening deep divisions within the *Chavista* ranks, the new international Left looks to Correa as the most formidable anti-U.S. Latin American leader.

He's charismatic, telegenic and with a PhD in Economics from the University of Illinois, has the academic chops to back up his ideology. Correa is awfully smug too, just ask talk show host John Oliver. The British comedian's epic rant during his HBO show, "Last Week Tonight" drew worldwide attention to Ecuador's relentless crackdown on free speech.

Though he took office in 2007, nominally for a maximum of two 5-year terms, Correa orchestrated a referendum to change the law and become president-for-life, just like in other Latin American left-wing dictatorships. So at just 51-years-old, that means he could have decades left in power. So why should Americans care? Well, he's waging a stealth war on U.S. power and influence which harms the country and our allies. He hurts our economy and impedes our efforts to stop narco-traffickers and terror networks, while hampering our ability to respond to natural disasters. He is driving out U.S. companies, our military and aid programs. First from Ecuador, and eventually he'd like the same for all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

In 2009, Correa closed a U.S. Air Force Forward Operating Location in the seaside town of Manta — despite the fact its counter-narcotics operations were responsible for 60% of drug seizures in the Eastern Pacific. Correa later expelled the U.S. military and aid workers from the Embassy in Quito.

He’s trying to seize billions in Chevron assets throughout Latin America for a court case settled in 1998. Correa hired former Congressman Bill Delahunt (D-Mass.), and celebrity entertainers Danny Glover and Mia Farrow to win the battle of ideas and prevail in court. This is despite a New York court uncovering corruption in Ecuador’s judiciary process, and unethical public relations stunts, including paid “extras” for public protests. Correa helps Iran ease the impact of international sanctions over its nuclear program.Ecuador has been included on the Paris-based inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) global list for money laundering since 2010. In 2013, Tehran’s Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi told Iran’s Press TV, “relations between Iran and Ecuador are at their highest level ever.” In 2014, Iran sent a parliamentary delegationto Quito to discuss cooperation in the mining and energy sectors. Meanwhile, Correa led an international delegation to China this year and receivedpledges of $7 billion in loans and lines of credit, along with promises of increased cooperation. Ecuador’s Foreign Minister Ricardo Patino told Russia’s Sputnik News this month that Russia and China are “brother countries” and has worked to sign agreements with Russia on oil and mining deals. Correa has also taken a leading role in Latin American political and economic blocs,ALBA, CELAC and UNASUR — all groups trying to reduce Uncle Sam’s regional influence. And considering his moves to gut the half-century old Inter-American Commission on Human Rights based in Washington, while simultaneously funding a new Latin American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica, that means he’ll selectively attack the U.S., while shielding his own abuses. So while most folks look for that handshake between Obama and Castro, the cameras ought to zoom in a little closer on whatever *Señor Rafael* is doing, even if it’s back in Quito. All Americans, North, Central and South, would benefit from learning more about*El Presidente* and his rising power on the world stage.